

# IN BRIEF

## Seattle Okays Downtown Float Planes

On 17 June, two Downtown condominium associations and the State ferry system filed appeals against a permit granted on 27 May by the City to Kenmore Air for a float plan base at Pier 54 (Ivar's) on the Downtown Seattle waterfront.

Operations are limited to flights by certain non-piston aircraft, with a temporary ban on sight-seeing flights. Only on Sunday is there a night-time curfew. Day-time take-offs must occur at least 2000 feet off-shore. Evening take-offs must occur 3000 feet off shore. No float planes may land closer than 1000 feet. The ferry system is concerned about safety hazards, and the condo-owners, about noise.

## Boeing Field Choppers

Although it has yet to present its Master Plan to the King County Council, KCIA management proposed in June to sign a 29-year lease with Classic Helicopters to expand their facilities at Boeing Field. "They are doing this backwards," protested Seattle Commission on Airport Affairs President Mike Rees. "They are signing the long-term leases, then making the plan, and finally studying the noise and pollution. This effectively cuts citizen participation out of the planning process." Nevertheless, the lease was pushed through the King County Council's Commerce, Trade and Economic Development Committee by its chair Dwight Pelz and later adopted by the full council. Classic Helicopters is owned by Karen Walling, who also serves on the KCIA Roundtable, an advisory body to airport management. After approval of the lease, Councilman Pelz proposed a reformed process for all subsequent leases.

# Truth in Aviation

The Newsletter of the Regional Commission on Airport Affairs

Vol.5, No. 4

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## Third Runway Costs Jump Another 31%

On 22 June, the Seattle Port Commission voted, 3-0, to accept a staff plan to add another \$186 million to its budget for construction of the third runway proposed at Sea-Tac Airport. This 31% increase brings the official estimated construction cost to \$773 million — for the runway alone. Port Commissioners blamed environmental laws and regulations for the increase in costs. However, no new laws or regulations affecting the project have come into force since the last increase in cost estimates, in 1997.

In the public-comment period just before the vote, RCAA President Al Furney, Len Oebser (speaking for C.A.S.E.), and members of the public urged the Commission to abandon the hugely over-budget project. Members of the Commission responded that the project was necessary to increase capacity at the Airport. Previously, the Port, FAA, and Puget Sound Regional Council have consistently stated that the new runway would NOT increase capacity, and that the sole purpose of the runway is to reduce bad-weather delay for arrival of passenger jets.

### What About Interest?

Mr. Furney pointed out to the Commissioners that the staff proposal failed to make any allowance for the cost of borrowed money. Most Sea-Tac expansion projects must be paid for with borrowed money, and the Port has already incurred an obligation of an additional \$255 million for interest on one third-runway bond issue. No estimate of interest charges was provided to the Commissioners, even after Mr. Furney's re-

marks. The Port has in hand only \$293 million in grants and bond proceeds. Under the latest estimate, the shortfall is \$479 million. Port staff attending the Commission meeting suggested that this sum would be made up from revenue, grants, and borrowing, but did not provide any

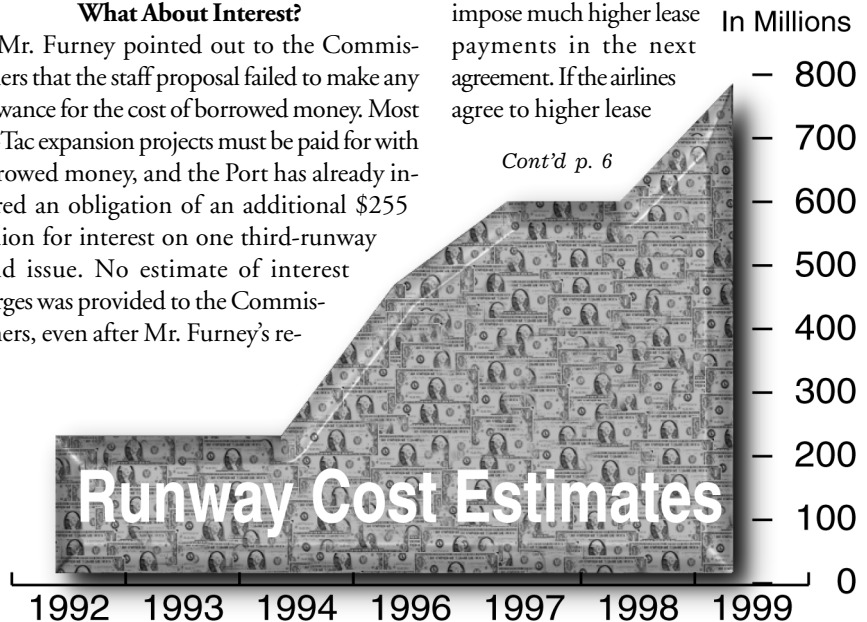
### "Our Clueless Port Commission"

—An editorial view page 5

estimate of how much would be forthcoming from any source. Nor did they identify any source that had actually committed to provide an additional funding. No report on negotiations with airlines for higher lease payments was presented.

### Higher Lease Payments? Passengers Pay

One possible source would be an increase in the amounts paid to the Port by the airlines for lease of facilities. The existing leases will expire 31 December 2001, and the Port hopes to impose much higher lease payments in the next agreement. If the airlines agree to higher lease



## Promoter Appeals City's Denial of Conveyor-belt Plan

The Westcot Company and Environmental Material Transport, LLC, both owned by Henry (Hank) Hopkins, have appealed Des Moines City Council's refusal to accommodate a conveyor belt from the Des Moines waterfront through a city park to Sea-Tac Airport.

The Council gave 16 reasons for declining to amend its comprehensive plan, including environmental damage and being bound by restrictive deed covenants to allow only parks uses in its parklands. The appeals, filed on June 8, ask King County Superior Court to "reverse" the City's decision and for the Growth Management Hearings board to take jurisdiction and force Des Moines to adopt the four comprehensive plan amendments proposed by Mr. Hopkins.

Mr. Hopkins and his companies own no land along the right-of-way, so the suit names affected property owners, including the Port of Seattle, the City of Des Moines itself, Midway Sewer District, State DOT, and the Department of Natural Resources. Mr. Hopkins' attorneys from Davis, Wright, & Tremaine argue in the appeals that "the conveyor project would result in substantially fewer truck trips for the transport of fill for the third runway, and therefore would reduce the environmental impacts resulting from construction of this essential public facility." The Port has never endorsed the project; Port staff commented in the EIS before the Des Moines City Council that the conveyor belt *might* provide *one* alternative for transporting runway fill. The Growth Management Hearings Board only has jurisdiction for "essential public facilities", such as airports. Observers describe the Hopkins appeal as "novel". Even if successful, Mr. Hopkins would still need permission from unwilling property owners, including the City of Des Moines, to use their property.

According the Secretary of State, Westcot is registered to Mr. Hopkins and his wife as officers at their home address in Lynnwood. The suit papers give a mail-drop address in Bellevue. Neither company is listed in the Eastside or King County phone books.

# Runways & Wetlands

## What's the Connection?



Before the Port can begin construction on the proposed third runway at Sea-Tac, it must obtain a variety of wetlands permits. These permits already have a tortured history, owing to poor planning by the Port, to the point that applications for them were withdrawn last Fall, and are now being rewritten for submission in late August, to be followed by new public hearings.

Sea-Tac was built in a boggy area at the headwaters of three large creeks flowing from near the Airport to the Sound (see map on page 3). Since it began operations five decades ago, the Airport has repeatedly polluted these creeks. Protecting their future water quality is at the heart of the Port's problems with wetlands permits.

The new runway would require filling a substantial amount of wetlands, and filling 3000 linear feet of existing streams. Under the federal Clean Water Act, such construction requires a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ("sec. 404 permit"). The Act also requires a certification by the State's Department of Ecology that the work will comply with the State's Coastal Zone Management Program and that water quality in the affected creeks during and after construction will meet State and Federal standards ("sec. 401 certification").

The 401 certification by Ecology was granted in July 1998, subject to a host of extraordinary restrictions and conditions, which the Port challenged in two appeals to the state Pollution Control Hearing Board.

### Wetlands Shrink, Expand, Expand

The 404 permit has given the Port even more trouble. In 1991, a Port consultant estimated that the project would need to fill 100 acres of wetlands. When the final environmental impact statement for Sea-Tac expansion was issued in 1996, the Port claimed that only 11.42 acres would be filled. The Port has proposed to build 20 acres of "replacement wetlands" in Auburn, in the drainage basin of the Green River. The 11.42 acres estimate was always suspect, and in September

1998 the Port admitted it was finding more wetlands in the fill area and withdrew its application, to be re-submitted when the count was final. The sec. 401 certificate from Ecology was withdrawn for the same reason, and the appeals were largely dismissed. Remaining issues were put on hold, pending a new filing by the Port with Ecology and the Engineers, and a new round of public hearings.

The Port is nearly done with its recount. As of now, the revised semi-official figure is slightly above 18 acres. The amount of acreage matters because, in most cases, replacement wetlands are only allowed if at least two acres of replacement wetlands are created for every lost acre. The Auburn replacement site only has room for 20 acres.

### Salmon Need Wetlands

The acreage is also significant because any additional loss of wetlands implies increased difficulty in keeping the creeks healthy and water quality satisfactory, especially where, as is the case here, there have already been serious losses of necessary wetlands before environmental rules came into effect. Thus, the remaining wetlands cannot keep streams healthy for salmon and other life. If the third-runway wetlands are not replaced in basin, there is a very serious question whether the Army Corps can legally issue the 404 permit.

The parties have been in close consultation since last winter. It is known that the Port is now revising its permit application and intends to file it in the latter part of August. Ecology and the Engineers will then schedule a new joint hearing somewhere in the vicinity of the Airport, and RCAA and CASE supporters will again attend to express their concerns about the permits.

Public comments at the hearings held last September raised a thicket of issues that still need to be addressed.

## Wetlands

From p. 2

\* Elsewhere, replacement wetlands have often failed. Will the Auburn artificial wetlands be any better?

\* Wetlands are normally supposed to be built in the watershed where wetlands are being destroyed. The Corps has asked the Port to examine this possibility, but the Port did not respond before withdrawing, so this remains an open question.

\* CASE has filed a legal challenge to the Port's assertion that there are no environmental consequences from replacing the wetlands in Auburn, rather than in basin. CASE seeks a ruling that the environmental review of the Auburn wetlands project should be combined with the 404 permit process.

\* Concerns were raised about the overall impact of nearly 30 million tons of fill dirt pressing down on the hydrologic system. Those

concerns are being addressed by a newly funded State study (see companion story, adjoining column). RCAA and CASE believe that the Corps should not hold hearings or consider the new 404 application until that study is completed and is made a part of the process.

### Water Rustlers??

When the Port appealed the 401 certification, it found itself counter-sued by the Highline Water District. The Port had told Ecology that it would rely on water from the Highline aquifer to recharge Des Moines Creek, thereby reducing pollution concentrations within acceptable limits. The Highline Water District filed a counter appeal, saying that it, not the Port, owned the water rights, and that the District would not allow the Port to use any of its water. That ownership issue remains to be decided, after the new application is filed and considered.

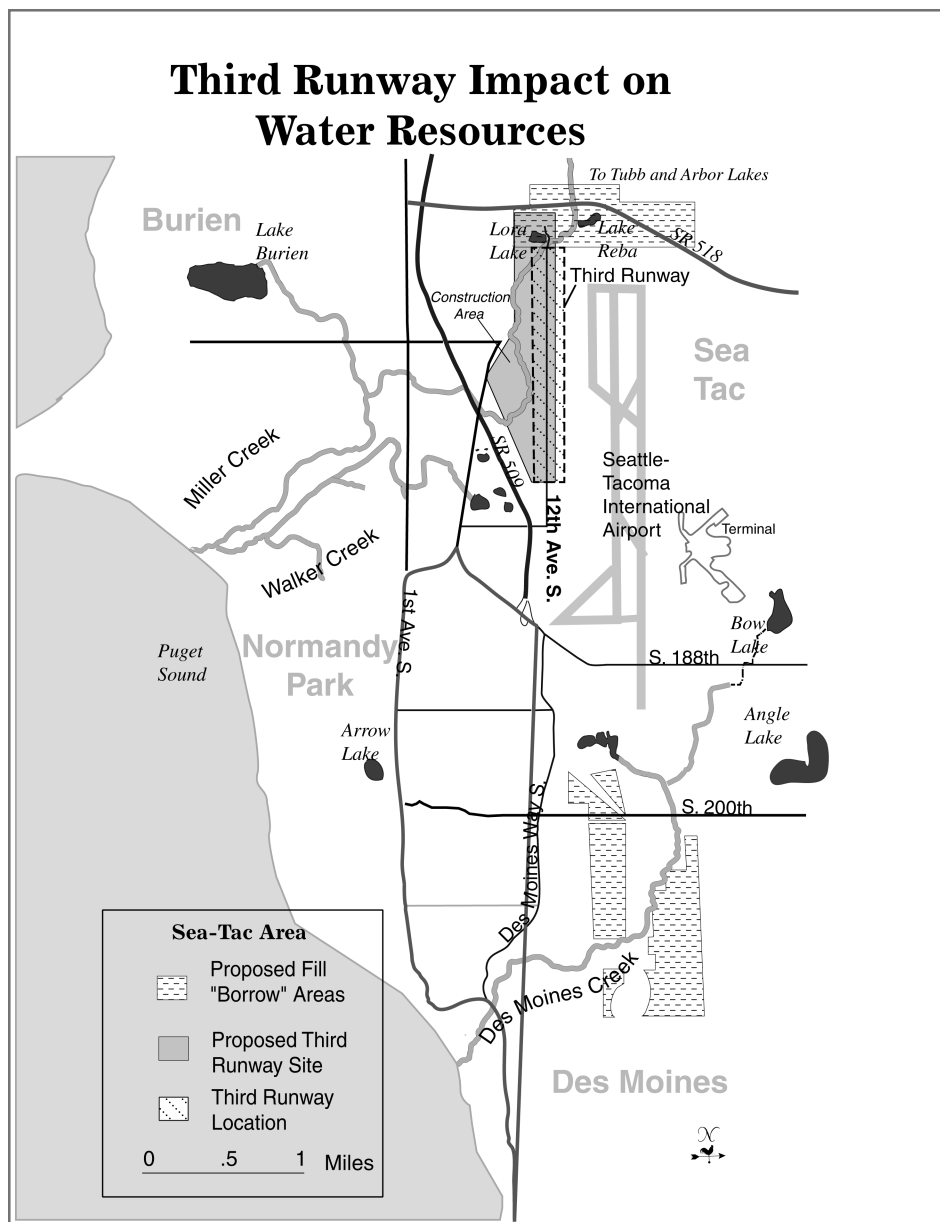
Cont'd p. 4

## Legislature Provides \$500,000 To Study Aquifer Issues

What kept the Port's lobbyists in Olympia busy this session? Fighting appropriations to pay for two studies of hydrology in areas that might be impacted by fill for Sea-Tac's proposed third runway. The appropriations were added to the State operating budget for 1999-2001 in the Senate, at the instance of Sen. Julia Patterson (D, 33) and Sen. Mike Heavey (D, 34). Even after the budget cleared the Legislature, heavy pressure was put on Governor Locke to delete the funds through his line-item veto. Solid support from State legislators, including the two Senate sponsors and Reps. Karen Keiser and Shay Schual-Berke (both D, 33) and Reps. Dow Constantine and Erik Poulsen (both D, 34) and other community leaders, and the general public persuaded the governor to withhold the veto.

One study will examine the impacts of fill operations for the runway on the Highline aquifer (which underlies Sea-Tac Airport and the third-runway site), as well as in-stream flow and sedimentation of Miller, Walker, and Des Moines Creeks. The second study will consider impacts of gravel removal on the hydrology of Maury Island, including impacts to the near-shore environment in the Sound, aquifer recharge, and potentials for ground-water and marine-sediment contamination.

The Department of Ecology will administer contracts with outside consultants to conduct the studies. Requests for proposals were issued in late June. Prebid conferences with prospective bidders were held on 9 July. Advisory committees for each study have been created. Sharon K. Nelson, President of "Preserve Our Islands", serves on the Maury Island committee, and Al Furney, Larry Covari, Chris Gower, and Peggy Bosley from Highline Water District serve on the Highline counterpart. Contractors are to be selected in late August, contracts signed and work begun in September, and final reports issued by 30 June 2000.



## Seattle Neighborhoods Join the Airport Fray

Twelve community groups have joined Seattle Council on Airport Affairs (SCAA), according to Bill Keithan (Magnolia), the group's treasurer. Nine of those groups are community councils, representing diverse neighborhoods suffering from aviation-related noise. The Seattle Community Council Federation, the city-wide neighborhood coalition, is also a member, as are SoundRights and Georgetown Powerplant Museum. SCAA addresses all airport-related issues affecting Seattle, including Sea-Tac expansion, increased Boeing Field traffic and the master plan update there, floatplanes, and helicopters.

The organization is heavily involved with the current Sea-Tac Part 150 study. On 15 July, SCAA formed a special Sea-Tac committee headed by Leschi resident Gwen Rench, to work more closely with the official Part 150 group.

### "Noise a Problem Everywhere"

Presentations are scheduled in the Fall to more community councils, including Montlake, Madrona, and Mt Baker, according to SCAA President Mike Rees. Individual SCAA members are found throughout the city, from Georgetown and Rainier Beach in the south to the northern city limits (Lake City). "Aviation noise is a problem everywhere in Seattle," said Mike Rees. "Our message is finding support everywhere we go."

SCAA is affiliated with the Regional Commission on Airport Affairs. Vice President Jamie Alls (Beacon Hill) is the official SCAA representative on the RCAA Board. *Truth in Aviation* readers and other RCAA supporters in Seattle are encouraged to join SCAA. Monthly general meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month, and a newsletter for members is issued quarterly. Information is available by mail from SCAA, PMB 146, 3213 W. Wheeler, Seattle, WA 98199, from their website ([www.scn.org/activism/scaa](http://www.scn.org/activism/scaa)), through the message phone (206.763.7222 [763.SCAA]), or by e-mail from the membership secretary at [chas@accessone.com](mailto:chas@accessone.com)

## Sea-Tac Part 150 Noise Study Heats Up

Two years into the process, Sea-Tac Airport's Part 150 study is at last attracting press and public attention, as the multi-party group begins work on detailed recommendations for reducing noise impacts from the airport.

Sea-Tac's noise became a major issue in Seattle and Federal Way in 1990, with the institution of the FAA's 'four-post plan', which effectively abolished previous noise-abatement procedures in favor of new routes that concentrated commercial jet traffic over neighborhoods previously not affected. The four-post plan created a 'West Turn' for Federal Way and revived an 'East Turn' for such communities as Leschi and Madrona in Seattle, north Mercer Island, and east-of-the-lake areas like Medina. The Part 150 study offers a chance for citizens to recommend movement of those routes, and re-institution of noise-abatement corridors.

A task force in Federal Way, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Adam Smith and supported by the City, has been negotiating for years with the FAA for a change in Federal Way's west turn. No-one has spoken up for Seattle or Eastside communities until late this Spring, when Part 150 meetings began to have numerous Seattle visitors pressing their case for a change in the East turn. This caught the attention of the local dailies. The *Eastside/South County Journal* has provided the most accurate coverage, while the *Seattle Times* managed to make basic errors, such as announcing that flights departing north from Sea-Tac fly up Lake Washington. (They actually fly over the heart of Seattle; east-turning planes cross the Lake more or less over and between the floating bridges.)

Inaccurate news coverage tends to pit communities against one another, instead of pointing out that the study aims at a consensus-driven investigation of noise over the entire region.

In addition to concerns about the four-post plan, the Part 150 committee will address other flight procedures at Sea-Tac (noise abatement corridors), changes in the Port's noise insulation program, and determining population centers and locating possible flight corridors having the least negative impact to our overall quality of life, according to Rose Clark of Burien, chairman of the Citizens' Ad Hoc Committee.

As to four-post changes, the study is investigating the idea that the current flight path causes repeated noise events over a single long corridor and that creating a corridor with three 'fingers' that turn east might reduce intense noise by

spreading it so a wider community gets less noise. "Instead of relentlessly hammering one community, the noise possibly could be dispersed at a lesser level over a wider area in an effort to conserve a meaningful quality of life.

*"Instead of relentlessly hammering one community, the noise possibly could be dispersed at a lesser level over a wider area in an effort to conserve a meaningful quality of life."*

—Rose Clark, Chair-Ad Hoc Commit-

But this is only a possibility still under investigation. Recommendations are a long ways away," says Ms Clark.

The citizens' committee is made up of representatives of King County Councilmanic districts and nearby cities. Members are people long familiar with impact issues. Meeting separately apart from Port of Seattle staff and consultants, the committee has drafted a "Statement of Objectives" for this Part 150 study, with an appendix of needed information for future committees here and elsewhere. As new Part 150 committees are established, this work will help committees nationwide to get a quicker start when dealing with local issues.

"We welcome community members from the region to our meetings. We hope that they will understand we are still in an information gathering stage," said Ms. Clark.

## Wetlands

From p. 3

If runway fill materials are imported from Maury Island, the Corps and Ecology must consider the impacts on groundwater and streams from possible contamination by arsenic, cadmium, and lead, which are present at high levels at the mine site and elsewhere on Maury.

The mine operator claims that the contamination will be removed before fill materials are shipped. These assertions cannot be accepted at face value, especially in light of the long record of Clean Water Act violations by the operator. The contamination issue will be addressed in the State hydrology studies.

*Is your "No Third Runway" sign tattered, torn, or 'gone with the wind'? Call Jim Bartlemay at 206.824.6589, and his eager crew will bring a replacement.*

## RCAA Needs You! *Your contributions and participation are vital.*

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ "No Third Runway" bumper strips.

*(No contribution is required.)*

\_\_\_\_ I want to contribute \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_ Please call me about volunteering.

\_\_\_\_ Please add my name to the e-mail update list.

### *Editorial*

## **Our Clueless Port Commission**

During the public uproar about the \$100 million cost overruns at the Mariners' stadium, the Seattle Port Commission quietly approved a much larger \$186 million cost increase in the budget for the Sea-Tac third runway. They asked no hard questions. Their responses to public input left onlookers with the strong impression that the Commissioners are extremely foggy on the big picture for this project, never mind the costly details.

"I know we have a lousy site, but we need the capacity," said Commissioner Gary Grant, apparently unaware that the third runway at Sea-Tac adds no capacity, only a small reduction in delays during bad weather. Commissioners Davis, Miller, and Nordquist were in agreement. It is amazing that the Commission does not know the reason for this project. At every step of the 10-year process, the Port has said that the runway will add no capacity, not even one more flight to Sea-Tac's traffic. The planning documents, the court filings, have consistently said that the reason and the only reason, for this huge expense is to reduce delays for arriving commercial jets during some bad-weather conditions. The FAA has agreed with this position consistently. And the courts have agreed, as well. This project is NOT about capacity. You'd think the Commissioners would know that, if they know anything at all about the business they manage.

### **Last Increase?**

Commissioner Paige Miller hoped this was the "last increase," even though the enormous increase in financing costs has not yet been presented to the Commissioners. RCAA's best estimate of the true cost of the project, with bor-

rowed money included, but without off-site mitigation costs, now stands at \$2.1 billion — an appalling price for a runway. The chart on p.6 shows that interest is projected to be 63.2 % of total project cost.

### **Little Mitigation**

Commissioner Miller overlooked costs of community mitigation. The existing estimates continue to provide a lousy \$50 million for ALL impacts. Wrong. One official study, limited to *some* impacts in only *one part* of the impacted area, put potential impact mitigation costs at between one and two billion dollars. Impacts on public schools of the Highline District are just now being studied in detail; impacts on Seattle schools are not even under consideration. There have been no studies in the northern part of the impact zone, so for that large area, no-one knows the amount of lost property values, lost local tax revenues, cost of needed noise insulation for homes and other buildings. Adverse health impacts have not been considered at all.

### **Interest Costs Unquestioned**

The Commissioners appeared not to understand that they will likely have to go to the bond market to finance the \$186 million cost increase. It seems to have escaped their attention that borrowed money has to be repaid with interest. Most businesses take cost of borrowed money into account in their planning — but not these folks.

The Airport's grandiose expansion plans have several very large, costly components - the third runway, the north terminal, and the people mover to the north terminal among them. The largest and most costly is the proposed third runway. And the cost of the runway is largely the cost of the 19.84 million cubic yards of fill. One would think that the Commission would be keenly aware of the amount and cost of this central element of the project. Alas, they were not aware that the

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Jeanne Moeller (Des Moines)  
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**Newsletter Editors:** Beth Means and Chas Talbot

staff had provided grossly understated figures for the amount of fill needed, and they were not knowledgeable enough to catch the errors in the revised figures provided during the public discussion.

A big part of the cost increase was a higher estimate for the price of fill. Where that fill will come from and how it will be moved are critical factors in determining the price to be paid. The staff provided no information on these points; the Commission asked no questions.

Is it wise to entrust this huge Airport business to a Board of Directors that does not know the purpose of the project? that does not know the basic facts about the third runway? that doesn't care enough to ask even the most rudimentary questions about the financing plans of the staff? that does not seem to know that interest must be paid on borrowed money?

This project was always destined to be an environmental disaster. Increasingly, we see that it will be a financial disaster as well. Seattle-area travellers and taxpayers should buckle up for a rough, expensive ride.



## **Meetings, Meetings**

\* The next two CASE meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, 1 September, and Wednesday, 6 October, at 7 p.m., at the ERAC Building, 15775 Ambaum S.W., Burien.

\* SCAA meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month, at 7 p.m., at the Jefferson Community Center, 3801 Beacon Ave. So., Seattle.

# Truth in Aviation

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## INSIDE:

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## Costs Jump

*From p. 1*

payments, they will necessarily increase ticket prices to and from Seattle, and the passengers will pay.

### Higher PFCs? Passengers Pay

Another possible source would be an increase in passenger facility charges from \$3 per departure to \$6, a change now being considered by Congress. If an increase is allowed, it will be added to the ticket price for departing passengers. This would raise \$33 million per year, at present traffic levels. And again, the passengers will pay.

### What Else? More Taxes?

If higher PFCs and higher lease payments are inadequate to pay for Sea-Tac expansion—as RCAA believes to be the case—the Port could turn to the FAA for more grants, or increase King County property taxes. The present grants come from a very limited pool of money, with many other airports clamoring for grants for their own expansion projects. The chances for an additional FAA grant look slim. The Port has the power to increase its portion of the county real-estate tax from the present \$35.4 million a year to roughly \$60 million without a vote of the people. Again, the passengers will pay —

p.6 their role as taxpayers.

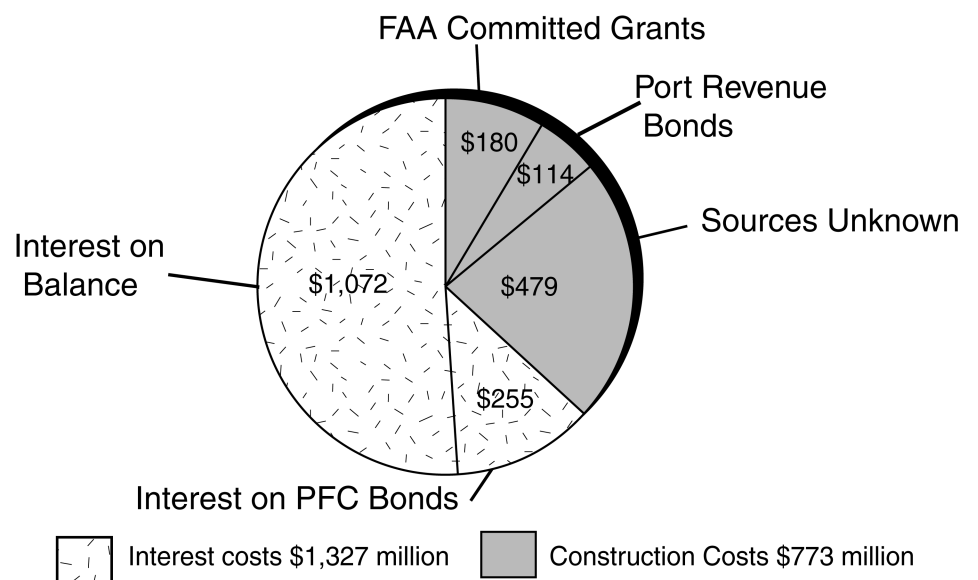
## The Vote

Shortly before the Commission voted on the increase, Commissioner Block quietly slipped away. Commissioner Grant did not

vote. That left Paige Miller, Clare Nordquist, and Pat Davis as supporters of the increased budget.

## Runway Costs Plus Finance Costs

(in millions)



Total=\$2.100 billion